

Suppose you have a set of points

$$(x_1, y_1), (x_2, y_2), (x_3, y_3), \dots, (x_n, y_n)$$

where the  $x_i$ s are distinct. Consider the polynomials made from products of these as follows.

$$P_j(X) = \frac{(X - x_1)(X - x_2) \dots (X - x_{j-1})(X - x_{j+1}) \dots (X - x_n)}{(x_j - x_1)(x_j - x_2) \dots (x_j - x_{j-1})(x_j - x_{j+1}) \dots (x_j - x_n)}$$

Here the top is the product of all the terms  $(X - x_i)$  except  $(X - x_j)$  and the bottom is the same with the variable  $X$  replaced by  $x_j$ . (So they are polynomials in  $X$  of degree  $n - 1$ .)

If you evaluate  $P(X)$  when  $X = x_j$ , then the top and bottom are the same, so  $P_j(x_j) = 1$ . If you use any other of the  $n$   $x$  values, say  $x_i$ , then the top is zero. This means  $P_j(x_i) = 0$  when  $i \neq j$ .

So now form the following sum.

$$P(X) = y_1 P_1(X) + y_2 P_2(X) + y_3 P_3(X) + \dots + y_n P_n(X).$$

When  $X = x_i$ , all terms except  $y_i P_i(X)$  are zero, and that one term is  $y_i \cdot 1 = y_i$ . This means  $P(x_i) = y_i$  for each of our  $i$  values. Thus we have a polynomial  $P(X)$  of degree (at most)  $n - 1$  which goes exactly through the  $n$  points we started with.